

POST-COMPULSORY CURRICULUM REFORMS

Statement

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [6.08 pm]: Earlier today in question time I asked the Minister for Education and Training whether she was aware of a survey that indicated overwhelming concern about the degree of understanding of certain issues by the Curriculum Council and overwhelming opposition to the further introduction of outcomes-based curriculum courses into year 11 next year. The minister indicated that she was not aware of that survey. Instead, she quoted some other sample that apparently had been gathered at professional development courses. I do not know under what conditions it was gathered - I assume it was controlled conditions, but I do not know whether it was simply a show of hands or whatever. As the minister said that she was not aware of the survey that was the subject of my question, I take the opportunity to make her aware of it on the public record. I first became aware of the survey, literally, when driving from my electorate on Monday morning when tuned into Paul Murray's talkback program on Radio 6PR. A discussion took place between Paul Murray, Greg Williams, who is one of the teachers behind the People Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes - PLATO - web site, and Mike Keely from the State School Teachers' Union of WA. Greg Williams referred to the survey in his comments, and that made me very interested. I put in a call to 6PR to make a comment, but it did not require my comment. That is the second time I have done that in recent weeks.

Several members interjected.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I cannot win them all! When I got to Perth later that day and plugged in my laptop, I found that a copy of the survey had been forwarded to me by Mr Williams. I understand that it is publicly available, and it is probably on the PLATO web site. I would be surprised if the minister has not been forwarded a copy of that survey, but it would certainly be available to her. I will briefly summarise the survey so that the minister will be left in no uncertain terms about what it was about and what it contains. The survey was conducted by secret ballot, and the teachers who completed the survey were able to express their opinions with total confidentiality. The survey was carefully structured so that no individual teachers or schools could be identified. Responses were received from 125 English and media teachers from 21 schools, including nine Catholic schools, 11 government schools and one independent school. That is a very representative body. I will table this document if members are interested. Five respondents were media teachers and 120 were English teachers. That is a pretty comprehensive sample. The survey indicates that English and media teachers are very concerned that the Curriculum Council has not yet explained in a clear and satisfactory manner at least nine points of concern. One hundred and twenty-three respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on that matter, none of the respondents was unsure and two disagreed. That was the spectrum of the responses they were required to give. The overarching question states -

In the light of the many unresolved assessment issues; and the fact that the Parliamentary Inquiry on the Courses of Study will not be delivered until June 2006;

Do you support the implementation of the English and Media Courses of Study in 2006?

One hundred and twenty of the 125 respondents said no, three said yes and two abstained. I will give members an idea of the age of the respondents. Let us not forget that it was a secret ballot, so we can presume that people were not afraid to divulge their age. Four per cent of respondents had taught for between zero and two years and 45 per cent had taught for more than 20 years. The summary states -

While a sample of 21 secondary schools does not represent a census -

It is not claimed to represent a definitive study, but it is a pretty good indication -

it is a significant population with respect to all schools offering Year 11 and 12 courses.

Approximately 6 teachers per school responded to the survey.

Overwhelmingly, the teachers are opposed to the introduction of the new English and Media COS in 2006. Overwhelmingly, the teachers responding believe there are at least 9 major concerns that the Curriculum Council has yet to answer.

Contrary to some views expressed publicly, it is not just the older teachers who are opposed to the changes, with only 45.6% of those opposing with more than 20 years experience.

According to the survey, the nine areas of concern that the teachers believe the Curriculum Council has not yet explained in a clear and satisfactory manner are -

How to resolve the inconsistencies between leveling based on the Progress Maps in years 8 to 10 and leveling based on the Scales of Achievement in years 11 and 12.

...

The details of how comparability in assessment standards (levels, outcomes and aspects) between schools will be achieved.

...

The details of how assessment based on levels, outcomes and aspects will be recorded in the Courses of Study and converted into a TER. *The so-called 'fine graining' system.*

...

The details of the new examination format to replace the current TEE.

...

The details of how the new exam will be weighted in the new TER.

...

The details of how the new exam will fit into the new Courses of Study assessment model.

...

The details of how a fair TER will be calculated in 2007 using two totally incompatible assessment systems.

...

The details of how the Federal Governments requirement for student achievement to be reported in quartiles and grades will be implemented in 2006.

...

How holistic teaching and assessment of the COS subjects can be achieved by using the proposed assessment model for the COS.

There is some very specific information that teachers require right now. In four months, they will be required to teach these courses and implement the assessment processes. The teachers are telling the public, through this survey, that they are totally unprepared, and they are urging the minister to delay the introduction of these courses until at least the implementation is addressed and the Curriculum Council details the requirements they will be faced with in January when they front up to their classrooms. That will be a very difficult and exacting time for many teachers. I assure the minister, even though she continues to deny it, that the overwhelming majority of teachers are very confused and concerned about the directions and timetables associated with these curriculum changes. They want a bit of breathing space, which means a delay in the implementation of these changes.